

ASC Sojourners – Historical Document

“Something New”

What is it that can birth a new form of religious life? Is it desire? A dream? A call deep in the heart and the courage to follow through? The movement that became the ASC US Sojourners Community began with all these manifestations of the Spirit over seven years ago. On June 23, 2007--a day now recognized as the Sojourners Foundation Day--a provisional proposal passed the regional Assembly that set the dream in motion and planted the seeds that would sprout, grow, and mutate into the present-day Sojourners. On that June day the proposal called for the establishment of a task force with a twofold objective: to research possibilities for an ASC alternate lay membership and to oversee a small group of women (then known as Collaborators) wanting to become non-canonical members. This proposal called for a three-year implementation period.

The origins of that seed-planting, however, had actually been manifested earlier than 2007 by several enterprising Adorers who had dared to dream that the ASC could include a group of the lay faithful within their own community. Such a group would unite with them in carrying out their mission and ministries. To concretize the dream, two of the Sisters had joined together to form the first task force that would be involved in this venture. They then invited one of the active Associates who was seeking a *more involved* relationship with the ASC to join them in drafting a detailed set of plans to be presented as a proposal to the June Assembly.

On the Saturday of that 2007 Assembly, this three-member task force was dissolved in the action that established the second task force (described above). At this time there were only two so-called Collaborators (one from the Wichita area and one from the Ruma area), and there was a sense of hesitation on the part of the Adorers to rush ahead and implement a plan that had not yet been *lived*. Thus, the way was cleared for something entirely new to be born.

Later that same summer, six members (including one lay member) were appointed by regional leadership to serve as the new task force. It was October by the time they held their first meeting, and it was the following January (2008) when these members, five lay women (soon to be six), and their Adorer Guides gathered in an ITV joint session. It was a difficult meeting because no one knew exactly how to proceed, and there was no unified vision. What was known, however, was that these lay women, who were already asking that they be called Sojourners, had a calling that embodied two foci which still endure: to form a faith-sharing lay community among themselves and to enter into and participate in the larger ASC Community as much as possible. To help them in living out this calling, they had each chosen a Sister Guide as a source of spiritual and practical help. Meetings between each Sojourner and her Guide would occur on a regular basis and serve as one avenue of accountability to the ASC Community. Four years later the Guides would be called Spiritual Mentors.

On March 4, 2008, the two Sojourners from the Wichita Center made a public commitment to pursue the path of *alternate membership in the Adorers of the Blood of Christ* for two years. Due to various reasons, all the Sojourners were unable to gather in one place on that date, so the other four made their commitments in their own locales as soon as possible. The inability for all to be in one place at the same time in order to meet face to face was a harbinger of how future meetings would be held. ITV and phone conferences became common place, and the Sojourners have since added limited use of SKYPE to their interactive technology.

The three years that followed this public commitment were filled with the lived experiences of what it means to turn an inchoate vision into specific reality. The answer to the question, *Who are we?* loomed large as both the task force and the Sojourners struggled to arrive at a definition. The former researched the experience of other

religious communities to learn how they incorporated the lay faithful and to what extent, and the Sojourners went from understanding themselves as *an alternate form of membership*, to a *secular branch that constitutes a distinct vocation sharing the ASC charism*, to their present definition as *a regional community of persons who live as the Sojourners Community within the larger ASC Community*.

Closely connected to the identity question was the one about whether and how the Sojourners differed from the ASC Associates. This question came up repeatedly and would only be answered over time in the Sojourners' definition of their own community and how they related to the ASC. Challenges from the task force, the Sisters themselves (especially in the annual regional Assemblies), canon lawyers, and others sent the Sojourners back to the drawing board again and again. Papers were written and rewritten--first as *Identity Documents*, then as *Guidelines*, and finally as the present *ASC Sojourners Foundational Document* (the tenth in the series).

Other changes occurred also. First, the Sojourners were to take three vows (*Simplicity, Unconditional Love, and Covenant*), based on the Evangelical Counsels; then the commitment became one *Vow of Charity*; and finally the one vow became three solemn promises (having the same names as the three vows above). In addition, the task force had initially created *modules* that involved study, reflection, and writing, but this project was curtailed when the Sojourners themselves declared that they wanted a voice in the decisions that affected them. They wanted their formation to be a mutually creative process between the Sojourner and Guide so that what was undertaken would be a *fit* with the Sojourner's previous experience (including life experiences) and would be geared to what was appropriate and possible for that individual. Although all six pioneer Sojourners had first been committed Associates, the Sojourners eventually decided that the requirement to first become an active Associate would not be a prerequisite for entering Sojourner formation. Instead the individualized formation process itself would include a study of the Associates *Preparation Manual* for those who did not already possess this basic information.

The turning over of a large part of the decision-making process to the Sojourners themselves heralded a key turning point and eventually brought the second task force to an end in March 2010. The Sister who had chaired the second task force was appointed by the regional leadership team to serve as the official ASC Liaison for the Sojourners. Some decisions regarding the latter would still be made by the former on behalf of the ASC Community. Accountability for the Sojourners had expanded beyond that of the individual Sojourners to each other and to their Guides to include the larger ASC Community. By 2009 and beyond, the Sojourners were composing most of their own documents--not only those pertaining to their identity and organizational structure--but those that explained their vows (later called solemn promises), one that listed extensive reading resources for both formation and ongoing formation, and another that described the interview process that future Sojourner candidates would undergo.

Perhaps nothing revealed the process of the increasing responsibility taken by the Sojourners so much as the regional Assemblies from 2008-2010. In 2008 the Sojourners presentation was given by the chair of the newly-appointed task force. At the 2009 Assembly, one of the Sojourners presented an overview of their progress, and the other Sojourners took turns answering questions from the other Assembly attendees. In 2010, although the liaison gave a short talk about the Sojourners, the Sojourners themselves were present as a kind of panel to answer questions. This was the Assembly that gave the Sojourners approval to continue experimentally for three additional years.

The February 2011 Regional Assembly brought a different kind of focus to the Sojourners. A proposal asking permission from the General Assembly to establish Sojourners-type communities on an international basis was passed. This proposal had originated from one of the LCNs but had also been promoted by the Sojourners themselves. In July of that year, the ASC General Assembly, meeting in Mysore, India, adopted a position that would be called "Beyond the Threshold: Toward New Models of ASC Consecrated Life," published in their *XX General Assembly Acts*. The wording of this section appeared to clear a path for the establishment of various ASC

lay communities throughout the world because it endorsed the continued exploration of alternate forms of commitment and styles of consecrated life.

Up until January 2011, the Sojourners had held their quarterly meetings in connection with their Guides (later known as Spiritual Mentors) and their ASC Liaison. At their meeting that January, they set the precedent of dividing their meeting time between a period in which only the Sojourners would participate in faith-sharing and conducting their business, and a time following in which all the Sojourners, Spiritual Mentors, and ASC Liaison would reflect together, raise questions, and make any further decisions. This procedure has continued into the present and has moved the Sojourners even further towards taking responsibility for their own community. In July 2011 they held their first retreat in Ruma, an event they themselves had planned. With the theme of building community, this retreat proved to be an important bonding event, and one in which the Sojourners gained insight into how far they had come since 2007.

It was on June 20, 2013, that the Sojourners finally became an official part of the ASC Family. On that day most of the members of the regional Assembly stood together as a sign of their affirmation to the following statement:

We, as the US Region, affirm and bless with spiritual support and companionship, the Sojourners vision to continue developing as a new form of community in mission fostered by the charism and spirituality of St. Maria De Mattias until the next General Assembly.

Throughout 2012-2014, the six Sojourners have continued to meet in order to share their faith, render accountability, and conduct their business. They have also continued to participate in the life of the larger ASC community (attending communal prayer, Mass, jubilees, wakes and funerals, LCN, community retreats, special birthdays, Assemblies, committees, study groups, and other meetings) as they are able. They are now planning their fourth annual retreat and laying plans for the future. One new Sojourners candidate is now undergoing formation, and the hope is to bring in additional new members.

One important milestone was the adoption of an official logo in 2012. The graphic image of this (shown below) portrays a cross and heart that resembles, but is not identical to, the heart and cross pendant worn by each ASC vowed member. The former shows the cross *within the heart*, and the resulting sterling silver pendant (crafted by a Wichita artisan) has the words "Adorer Sojourner" engraved on the left side of the heart, and "Covenant of Love" on the right. A small garnet stone within the heart portrays the drop of blood. This logo shows the significance of the *community within a community* aspect of the Sojourners identity.

Throughout these formative years, the Sojourners have used the questions and challenges from the Sisters, together with their own internal struggles, to grow in their self-understanding of who they are as a community. They have been inspired by the Sisters' dedication and willingness to walk with them through this new venture to become more accountable, more accepting, and more cognizant of what the themes of adoration, redemption, conscious love, and living the Paschal Mystery really mean. The Sisters, in turn, have become more encouraging and have enlarged their concept of inclusion to ponder more deeply what it means to walk the new way.

In the past seven years the Sojourners have lived and continue to do so what the American philosopher and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, penned the words,

***Do not go where the path may lead,
go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.***

